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Name: Lobsang Samden [Tib. blo bzang bsam gtan]
Gender: Male
Age: 46
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Abstract

Lobsang Samden was the brother of the 14th Dalai Lama. In this interview, he discusses the meeting in which the Kashag received a telegram from Chamdo and mentions the arrival of Taktse Rimpoche with a message from the Chinese. Lobsang talks about receiving a negative answer from the U.S. through Shakabpa, how his brother Gyalo Thondup, Shakabpa and Richardson went to New York to submit a petition to the UN, and the meetings held in Yadong (Tromo) prior to and after the signing of the 17-Point Agreement. Lobsang Samden also mentions his appointment as a dzasa and attending the tsondu gyendzom to discuss the Dalai Lama's travel plans.

Tape 1

Q: We have a number of things that we are not sure about in 1949, 1950 and 51. We are not clear about what happened and why it happened. In Shakabpa's book, he said that he went to Delhi to negotiate and the Chinese said three points. One was to accept Tibet as a part of China, the second was that the foreign policy would be conducted by China and the third was that the military would also be controlled by China. Shakabpa wrote that he didn't have the authority to do that and wrote back to Lhasa, and then there was a period of one month. This was in September when he sent the cable to the Kashag. I heard that there was a big debate in Lhasa on whether to accept the three points or not. He suggested the first point should be accepted as named, the second would be that Tibet should maintain its foreign policy with India and Nepal, and the military was the last one. If you can, tell us anything about the nature of the debate and then the end of it, the Kashag and the cable saying that they accepted point one as named and not points 2-3. He tells a long story about that. This was strange that it was in November.

A: This must be when the Dalai Lama just arrived from Yadong.

No, it was after that and just before he took the political and the religious power.

Q: This was just after Chamdo fell, but the cable came with the name of the Dalai Lama. What he said was somehow suggested by somebody, probably the Dalai Lama. I am not sure that they said don't accept anything. Then the argument went on and at that time, everybody was in Lhasa. Do you remember anything about this?

A: No, it is very hard for me to remember. You know, Gusung Depön Phüntso Tashi was with Shakabpa and Mr. Jigme Taring was also with Shakabpa. You can ask them.

Q: Yes, but we don't know about the Lhasa side. Was the argument for or against and who was arguing? That we are not sure about.

A: It is very hard for me to remember because I was probably in Drepung Monastery and especially, I was not a shungshab. So I don't remember because the Dalai Lama had not come back from Yadong.

Q: Can you remember anything about a month later when Chamdo was lost and there were a lot of activities to send missions everywhere like America and China. And the Dalai Lama decided to go to Yadong or India. Can you tell us in your own words what you saw and heard about all of that? There was talk to build an airfield because there was fear that the Chinese might cut the road to India and there were government contingency plans.

A: I also don't remember this well because I was very sick then and I was staying in the Yabshi Jangsebsgshar [Tib. lchang gseb]

shar]. When Chamdo was lost they were giving a party or something, the Yigtsang Linga in the Trede Linga. According to Tibetan custom they would give the party for a week or so. I heard that they received the telegram at the party and the Kashag all of a sudden went to hold the meeting and they were in a very hurried manner.

Q: Did they go to hold the meeting?

A: Yes, they did. And there were the Kashag and the trungtsi.

Q: Do you mean they held the meeting at the party?

A: Yes, and the people outside didn't know what was going on in there. Regarding what you said that if the road was cut to build the airfield. There was such talk. This I remember, but I don't have any details to tell you about this.

Q: Who knew that?

A: There is almost nobody who knows these things.

Q: There is not a single kalön, trunyichemmo or tsipön, right?

A: Yes.

Q: There is only Shakabpa who is in Delhi.

A: There are some government officials in Dharamsala who weren't in the important posts then, like the Laja Thubden Tempa [Tib. bla phyag thub bstan bstan pa]. He probably knows a little about these things. And there is also Shartsela [Tib. shar rtse lags].

A: Shartsela was then a young shungshab [official] and was a thoughtless [Tib. to ro mo ro] person. There was also Ngawang Thöndrup and Ngawang Rigdrol.

Q: What do you have of importance to say?

Q: I heard recently that the Americans had sent a letter to the Kashag to send a mission of two Tibetan delegates, Thubden Sangye [Tib. rhub bstan sangs rgyas] and Dingja [Tib. lding bya]. The Americans said it would be better to negotiate with the Chinese, implying that they were not interested in helping. Have you heard about even one of them? I think I can find a document in America.

A: I don't have anything to tell you about this. The best person to answer this question is Thubden Sangye [Tib. thub bstan sangs rgyas] who was also among the meeting members.

Q: He said that he was in Gyantse for 6 months.

A: Maybe he was already sent and was in Gyantse. When he was sent they would have given the instructions.

Q: We know the instructions but don't know the reply.

A: There were two. One said don't come and the other said come but you have to negotiate with China. And if you want to petition the UNO, the president is so and so.

A: I don't have anything certain to tell you, but I think they probably didn't submit the petition to the U.S. saying that they were going to send the mission. Shakabpa was probably sending this from Kalimpong.

A: They probably sent it to Richardson in Dekyilingka from Lhasa.

A: Richardson definitely had something to say and Shakabpa was the best.

Q: People say that the office was not feasible. The regent might have said, "Well, let's negotiate with China first," because they had no choice because there was no foreign country promising [aid]. When your brother came to Lhasa, do you have any idea when he came? It seems to me it was just after the Dalai Lama returned.

A: It was when the Dalai Lama was just about to take power that we received a message saying that Taktse Rimpoche had arrived in Nagchu. When he came up, the Chinese made him do many things and he came up like having an inner side and an outer side. One was the Chinese message and the other was what he told the Dalai Lama that it would be very dangerous because the situation was not good. He also told the Kashag about that. So Taktse Rimpoche left for Yadong first. There were two other lamas also with him.

Q: Weren't there 2-3 Chinese also?

A: Probably. Regarding this, Taktse Rimpoche is still alive. So you [should] ask him. The other lama was called Shar Kelden Gyatso [Tib. shar skal ldan rgya mtsho], and Agya Trülku was also there.

Q: One of their ideas was to try to get and use religious figures because the Chinese say now that the old government was no good, that's why they liberated the people. In the 1950s they never said that once. They were saying that they were going to liberate them from the imperialists. So my theory is why did they say that. That's the proof that they couldn't say the old system was no good and they were going to overthrow it despite [the fact that] in China, they were eliminating the middle and the landlords. At

that time, they said that they were going to respect religion. In Amdo, they used Geshe Sherab Gyatso [Tib. shes rab rgya mtsho]. Did you and your brother talk about what might have motivated the man like that? They also used the Getag Lama in Kham because it was effective.

A: As for Geshe Sherabla, he was very famous and knowledgeable, but was there any talk about Geshe Sherab and Geda Lama being used by the Chinese? Does Dr. Goldstein mean that because of that the Dalai Lama was also frightened?

Q: No, the Chinese were always using the lamas.

A: At that time, Geshe Sherab was in Kumbum. Then the Chinese brought him from Kumbum to China. The reason why the Chinese made him do the propaganda was because he didn't get along well with the old government ideologically and he went to Amdo. When he said that he was coming up to Lhasa, the local government didn't let him come up. For this, he might have had something in his mind. So the Chinese took this opportunity and used him. I am not sure about Geda Trülku. It was not only the lamas, there was Panda Tobgye [Tib. spom mda stobs rgyas] and many chiefs.

A: Like Jagö Tomden [Tib. bya rgos stobs ldan].

A: They used these people because they had names in the society.

Q: What Dr. Goldstein said was that they didn't say that they were going to liberate the people in the 1950s because they had to use the lamas and the chiefs. And what they are saying now is different. At that time, they were saying that they were going to liberate [the people] from foreign imperialists.

Q: You said that Geshe Sherab had a different ideology. Was that the religious or political?

A: That was probably a political ideology.

Q: I think that was the first U.S. negative answer, saying that they wouldn't listen. Do you remember that in Yadong? Do you remember that? This was when the U.N. said that they were not going to bring it up.

A: Yes, probably the message came through Shakabpa because he submitted the petition to the U.N. from Kalimpong. And they had given them Shakabpa's address.

Q: I also read that Richardson helped draft them. Did you hear that?

A: I don't have anything to tell you. Mel la meant this was the first petition. So how could Richardson be there because he was in Lhasa?

Q: It was sent before they moved in November. It was sent before the Dalai lama left.

A: What are saying? At that time, Richardson was not there.

Q: He was the Indian Consulate.

A: Do you mean when the Dalai Lama went to Yadong?

Q: He was there from 1947-1950 and for a couple of months.

A: When the Dalai Lama went to Yadong, Richardson was not there in Lhasa.

Q: I heard that he was there when the first invitation was written.

A: I am not sure about this.

Q: It was a month before the Dalai Lama took power.

A: Probably. I am not sure about the first one. Later, when the Dalai Lama came to India and they submitted the petition to the U.N., my brother Gyalola, Shakabpa and Richardson went to New York together. I remember that.

Q: This was in 1959, did Richardson go there?

A: Yes. He went with Decason and Pashundam.

Q: Did you have any idea about how El Salvador was involved in this and became the country who supported Tibet? I guess Lowell Thomas was the person who got the idea.

A: I have no idea. Did El Salvador sponsor [Tibet] when the first petition was submitted?

Q: Yes, it was El Salvador alone.

A: I think Shakabpa can tell you this clearly.

A: In the between that time, Shakabpa did something like withdraw from this.

A: When the first petition was submitted it was in the Shakabpa House in Kalimpong, and didn't Shakabpa conclude all the things later in his name?

A: In between that there was talk about Sursur Dzasa in 1959.

A: At that time, there were Sursur and the Trunyichemmo Chömpel Thubden [Tib. chos 'phel thub bstan], and they left Lhasa before the Dalai lama left for Yadong.

A: When was it decided that the Dalai Lama would take power?

Q: What were they supposed to be doing? What was the importance?

A: At that time, Shakabpa, Depön Phüntso Tashi and Sandu Rinchen were sent to India before that and they were supposed to talk with the delegation from Communist China and go to China via Hong Kong. I don't think that Sursur et cetera were sent to talk with the Chinese. They had another mission.

Q: Was it to talk with India?

A: Yes, they stayed in Calcutta and Kalimpong for a long time.

Q: And there was also the third one. I think Depön went about the trade agency.

A: They were in Kalimpong already.

Q: They were going to talk with the Indian Government about setting an equivalent Gyantse Trade Mission.

A: There was the Trade Mission before that.

A: Regarding this, it was written clearly in Shakabpa's book saying that he was supposed to set it up in Delhi, but they didn't consult him.

Q: What Lhautara said was that they went to talk with the same Chinese and then they came back to Yadong. The Chinese said, "Send people to Beijing," and extra people were sent, like Kheme [Tib. khe smad] dzasa et cetera. Although he is kind of insane, but also the father of the Tenzin Geje [Tib. bstan 'dzin dge byed]. Wasn't he the staff officer [Tib. las bya] of the Trade Mission? Yes, he was.

A: The Trade Mission was a separate one and there were three groups of delegations. One was with Shakabpa, the second was Sursur Dzasa et cetera and the third was the Surkhang Depön et cetera who were said to be talking about trade. In one month three different delegations came. I doubt that at that time the regent was changing. Shakabpa was very powerful and whatever he suggested, Taktra would accept. So the situation changed all of sudden saying that it was an order from the Dalai Lama. At that time, people didn't know the real reason to send Sursur and Chömpel Thubden. Actually, they sent additional people.

A: I have no idea about this. When Surkhang was there, Tenzin Geje's father was the staff official.

Q: What were the people talking about before the 17-Point Agreement came? And what kind of preparations were people thinking about?

A: I don't remember much, but when they held the meeting in Yadong, it was said that the Dalai Lama should go to India. We can't bear the responsibility if he stays in Yadong and Shakabpa went to talk with the Indians about the Dalai Lama's coming. At that time, Shakabpa was in India and we received much information from Shakabpa, and he also came in person 1-2 times to Yadong and went back to India. Once he came for this matter and once he came for the relics of the Buddha. Later, I didn't know what happened internally. When we got the information about the 17-Point Agreement, they also held a meeting.

Q: What did you think when you first heard about the 17-Point Agreement? And how did you hear about that?

A: They had a meeting in Yadong Dunggar [Tib. dung dkar] Monastery for a couple of days. So some of them were discussing and explaining and some said that this was not good at all, and some said we couldn't do more than this. They took the words and talked about understanding the meaning and the main person in the meeting was Talama Jawtang [Tib. lcog steng].

Q: Was he in favor of going back or going to India?

A: Going back to Tibet. Tsipön Namseling et cetera said strongly that he should go to India.

Q: Were you favor of going to India?

A: I didn't have any special feelings then.

A: Lhautara said that Lobsang Samden was in favor of going to India and he also wrote that Namseling became the only one without friends [Tib. grogs med gcig pu].

A: He just was saying that.

Q: He said that Surkhang and Trijang Rimpoche were also favor of going to India.

A: The abbots of the three great monasteries were there and the people in favor of going back to Tibet won.

A: Those in favor of going back probably outnumbered the others.

Q: Do you remember if Trijang Rimpoche was in favor of going back?

A: He would not attend the meeting.

Q: You were in the meeting, right?

A: Yes, because I was appointed as a dzasa and this was the tsondu gyendzom (full assembly meeting).

Q: How many days did they hold the meeting for?

A: At least 4-5 days.

Q: Who was against Namseling?

A: There was Shagor Khembo [Tib. shag sgor mkhan po] who was insisting on going back to Tibet.

A: He didn't have any knowledge and was not thoughtful. Anyway, the delegates of the three great monasteries were the most powerful ones in favor of going back.

Q: Some said that the Gadrung Dumra [Tib. ldum ra] [question not finished].

A: He was favor of going back.

Q: I heard that the people who wanted to go back said, "Initially, Shakabpa wrote that the India will welcome the Dalai Lama and foreign countries will also help. When everybody got into Yadong, they found out that was not the case. The Indian Government would admit the Dalai Lama and the Tibetans, but only as individual refugees and as stateless. You people used to talk that we have to go out, we will get outside help, but the U.N. hasn't done anything and the Americans haven't said anything." They were arguing that it didn't sound like a good enough deal. We also heard that at this time, the U.S. Government secretly had said that if they rejected the 17-Point Agreement, they would help though it was [only] to an extent. It sounds to me like the issues were not good enough so people should go back and work out something with the Chinese.

A: At that time, at the meeting in Yadong, there were two groups, one in favor of going to India and another [in favor of] going back. Finally, going back won. Our representative abroad was Shakabpa who was saying that we would do something in India. He knows the best. I would say yes to the reasons that you said for going back.

Q: What was the counter reason for saying that we should go to India?

A: They were saying, "If we arrive [in] India, it is a free country. Although we are now a small one, but if we make a plan rather than staying under the Chinese, we can do something gradually. If we go under the Chinese, then it is finished and it will become like making us to wear a wet skin hat, which when it dries, it will become tighter and tighter."

Q: Was there any talk about going to Asian countries other than India or to America?

A: There wasn't any talk like that.

Q: Did people talk in the meeting or privately? It seems to me that when Kheme and Lhautara were sent [to Beijing], they had two instructions and there were 10 points given, and they had secret instructions which told them that they should not make any major decision without contacting Yadong. So afterwards, it seems to me that they deliberately disobeyed their orders. The only time I know of that they asked something to Yadong was when the Chinese [said they] would stop the negotiations. But after that, I think they wired Yadong and then as we heard, it [was] wired.

A: There wasn't any wire at all.

Q: No, I mean wireless.

A: If I have understood what you said, when Lhautara and Kheme were sent through Hong Kong, as you said there were the 10 points and the secret instructions. This could probably be. After they went down [to Beijing], I don't recall that they had asked Yadong about what they had discussed. When Yadong was waiting for the information [about] what had happened there, they heard when the 17-Point Agreement was almost decided. I don't remember anything other than that.

Q: Don't you remember at the start when they contacted regarding the Panchen Lama?

A: No.

Q: Did you have any idea why the government didn't wire Beijing and say what was going on there?

A: They probably might have done that. But, I don't recall. But they were saying that they didn't receive information from there. At that time, the main ones in charge were the Kashag and the Trungtsi.

Q: It seems to me that after the signing was done, Ngabö really had the authority to make the decision. But that's not what I understand that he had. Like in America, the president makes the treaty and the Congress says that we will do that. It seems to me it was easy for Yadong to say, "My goodness! What is this 17-Point Agreement? We don't agree with that." What I heard was that Ngabö said that if we asked Yadong questions, nothing could be done because this abbot would say that [in opposition]. So he took it on his own authority to say that, "I am not going to tell anybody and we will just do it. If Yadong don't like it, they can say that they don't agree." Was there a lot of talk that how could he do this because he didn't have the authority?

A: At that time, regarding this, they held meetings and they explained about what they had done regarding the 17-Point

Agreement. Finally, since the Agreement was decided, I don't recall having that kind of talk. When we look at the Agreement all of a sudden, it looks very nice saying that the Dalai Lama will have the power, and that there will be religious freedom and there will be no change on the political power. So I don't think anybody said that we didn't agree this. At that time, there was also the talk that Mao Zedong's representative was coming via India, so there wasn't much time.

Q: I heard that when Kheme and Lhautara were sent, the Dalai Lama said that the government would go to the Dzelebla [Tib. rdza leb la] Pass and that there was actually a plan if the tsondu said that they were to go to India. It is not that they were coming [question not finished].

A: This is a new talk. I have never heard this.

Q: Do you think that kind of plan could have [been] done without you knowing?

A: I don't have anything to do with politics. There was the Kashag and the Trungtsi. If they had this kind of talk I would have known.

Q: Did anybody talk about the 8-Point [secret] Agreement that talks about the cooperation of the putting the Tibetan Army into the Chinese Army, and the plan to leave only the Gyajong Regiment and the 2 secret points. I don't understand, but it sounded to me like even [if] the Dalai Lama decided to go to India, his title and power would still remain and they would send his expenditures from Tibet. Have you seen these?

A: I don't have any idea about this. This is new for me. What we heard outside was the 17-Point Agreement. Mel la is really a person doing research, so he could find some strange things.

Q: After the assembly decided to go back, we heard that people who wanted to go to India asked for a senriy (divine lottery) in order to find something because they felt strongly we should go to India. I heard that Surkhang said why don't we do a senriy. I heard that there was such a feeling at the time that after the senriy, Trijang Rimpoche and Surkhang Sawangchemmo opened up the other balls to see that there was really something written on [them] [that the lottery had not been rigged].

A: I don't have any idea about this.

Q: Where did they do the senriy? Was it in the Dalai Lama's room or in the monastery?

A: At that time, the Dalai Lama was staying in Dunggar Monastery. So the Dalai Lama probably went with the Kashag and Trungtsi to the monastery in the Dalai Lama's quarters, and there were also the two tutors.

Q: Why do you think that Tibet lost everything? What did you think were the factors that led to it? It looks to me that the army didn't put up much of a fight. I don't understand why they didn't call the soldiers from the people age 18-60 and monk soldiers [Tib. ser dmag]. There were 20,000 monks. During the regents, they only thought of negotiation and the foreign help, rather than fighting. What do you think?

A: It was not that the Tibetans didn't take any methods, they also fought according to their ability [Tib. dpag tshod].

Q: This is not it. He is saying that they didn't fight strongly.

A: How could we fight strongly? You know how Tibetans are and what weapons we have. And what weapons the Chinese have and [how] they have so many soldiers which outnumbered the Tibetans.

Q: In the 1950s the Chinese didn't have that many weapons.

A: The Tibetans fought everywhere but there was a big difference in the number of people. The Chinese had already arrived at the eastern side of the Yangtse River. They came to Chamdo all of a sudden although the Tibetans fought.

Q: I will be frank with you and it seems to me that at the time when Ngabö was appointed as the Kalön, everybody who met him everywhere was always saying that the Chinese were too strong and the communists have all these weapons. Lhalu, from the beginning, was interested in fighting all the time. There were some evidence at that time, that the Chinese were not undefeatable because Muja Depön in July 1950 defeated a Chinese group that crossed the river in summer and killed many Chinese with the help of the Shotalthosum [militia]. It's hard for me as a westerner to understand that in this critical time, [they sent a] kalön [Ngabö] who was saying from the start he is not really too interested in fighting. As soon as he got to Chamdo, Lhalu wanted all these bunkers everywhere. The government sent him as the second, not first, it looks like the people have given up hope for fighting. Maybe he was right, it was better not to lose 500,000 people. I can't make that judgment. When the Western countries didn't do anything, the Tibetan Government felt that they can't do it. I think there are options like guerilla warfare with everyone and the monks participating.

A: This is very hard to say. According to my personal thought, When Lhalu went first as the Doji, it has been quite a long time since he worked [at a position]. When the trouble started, Lhalu was transferred and Ngabö was sent. This is very strange. Finally, Lhalu came up to Giamba and Ngabö stayed there. When Lhalu was the Doji, he knew about the situation and he thought that there would be trouble and he internally resigned in a nice way through his relations in the government. Ngabö also did his best and when he was the tsipön, he did a lot of work and he was a very straightforward and tough person. He was very honest. Actually, Lhalu was there for several years, so he should have stayed there and done that.